

BILL: House Bill 1557
TITLE: Public Schools - Health Services - County Boards of Education and Health Departments
POSITION: OPPOSE
DATE: March 4, 2020
COMMITTEE: Ways and Means Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) opposes House Bill 1557. MABE supports maintaining the current system of providing school health services; services which in half of the 24 school systems are provided by school nurses and health staff employed within school systems and, in the other half, provided by school nurses employed by local health departments.

MABE appreciates the legislature's continued focus on expanding the scope and improving the quality of school health and behavioral health services. In recent years, as Maryland has adopted new and more robust policies regarding student health issues such as diabetes, sickle cell disease, concussions, and depression, MABE has been impressed by the cooperation among local health departments, school systems, medical professionals, and parents. The school health policies and practices developed through these collaborative efforts are improving the quality of life for students throughout the State. At no point in these deliberations was it proposed that the primary authority and responsibility for providing student health services in public schools be transferred from local school systems to local health departments, and certainly not to the Maryland Department of Health.

Of course, whenever school health policy issues are raised, it is acknowledged that Maryland's is a blended school health services delivery system, in which either local health departments or school systems employ the school nurses providing school based services. However, this fact has not impeded the development or implementation of school health guidelines, policies, or programs. MABE firmly believes that this is due to the collaborative stakeholder process described above, and to the respected leadership and shared responsibilities of the Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health.

Again, MABE opposes this bill's proposal to transfer the primary responsibility for administering student health services away from local school systems and to local health departments.

For the reasons outlined above, MABE requests an unfavorable report on House Bill 1557.